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NSC BRIEFING

13 May 1954

INDOCHINA MILITARY

I. Generally accepted fact war Indochina
will be won, lost in Tonkin delta.

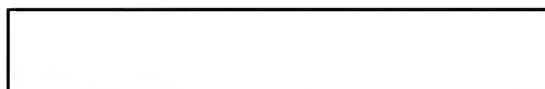
A. Militarily, control means hold
on most densely populated
(7,000,000) area.

1. Contains second best
seaport Indochina,
four of six major
airfields.

B. Economically, Viet Minh capture
would give it light industrial
facilities far beyond what it
now has.

1. Also, delta normally
produces about 2,000,000
tons rice annually.

DIA and DOS review(s)
completed.



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C. Psychologically, it traditional
center nationalism in Vietnam
and loss would be heavy blow
anti-Communist morale rest
Vietnam.

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IV. American army attaché Saigon believes entire Dien Bien Phu force can return delta, combat-ready, by 2 June. Thus, according to French figures, over 40 ^{REGULAR} battalions could be concentrated delta. In addition, there are reserves of regional forces now north of delta in training.

A. Army attaché expects Viet Minh to move swiftly and attempt force decision in delta before rains bog down operations around 15 July.

B. American military observers Saigon believe control delta airfields key to struggle; if airfields lost, Hanoi will become another Dien Bien Phu.

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C. Enemy movement from Dien Bien Phu not yet discerned but air observation shows it abandoned its AA emplacements.

V. Viet Minh now has 37mm AA guns protecting supply route from Caobang southward to delta, according French.

A. This underlines report last week that enemy improving supply network from China border to delta.

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XII. In Cambodia, invasion early April by two regular Viet Minh battalions upset delicate military balance Cambodia.

- A. Shift of Cambodian units (meet threat northeast) exposed south, central portions country to increased enemy harassment.
- B. O'Daniel, after 10-11 May visit Phnom Penh, commented on defensive-mindedness of Cambodians (due French advice) and failure Cambodians react to Viet Minh incursion as invaded nation should.
- C. O'Daniel believes Cambodians must form three light divisions by November, otherwise country will be under heavy Viet Minh invasion.

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VIII. Daniel, apparently reversing past French strategy, this week told Dillon in Paris that French might be forced withdraw completely from Laos and Cambodia to protect key areas Vietnam.

A. Such withdrawal from Laos would deliver that country to the Viet Minh in short order.

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B. Cambodia could be expected
oppose Viet Minh in the
hope of US technical aid.
But any Viet Minh intervention
in division strength would
bring about quick collapse.